

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN

INDIANAPOLIS – The pace has slowed this week and after two weeks of constant activity, House members have been able to catch up on constituent calls and begin committee work on Senate bills.

For the next three weeks, representatives will be working on 150 bills and one joint resolution sent to the Indiana House by the state Senate. Our schedules will look the same as at the start of this year: most of our time in committees, followed by floor sessions that will grow increasingly longer as days go by.

There will be one difference this time. As we work through the Senate's bills, we also will be keeping an eye on the 122 House bills and one joint resolution that have been sent across the hall. That means two sets of committee meetings to attend, which makes things much more hectic. These are the days when you see many lawmakers running from one end of the Statehouse to the other, trying to keep track of all their bills.

Although each bill we address will have a significant impact on our state, the governor's plan to lease the Indiana Toll Road to finance his Major Moves program continues to be the most discussed topic in the State House. This bill is significant to us as it also provides the governor the authority to enter into a public-private partnership agreement for a private company to design, build and operate I-69 as a toll road.

I appreciate the response you have provided to me on the topic of road funding. Your input has allowed me to ask important questions and understand the stance you have on toll roads and potential foreign investment in our roads.

The second most talked about bill is HB 1001, which is being promoted as providing \$150 million in property tax relief. However, there is no plan on how to pay for this relief and leading members of the Senate have already stated this bill will undergo radical change. Speculation is that they will use this legislation as a vehicle to advance a plan that would enable local units of government to pass several types of local option taxes to provide property tax relief and fund government operations.

Since our focal point in the House will be on Senate bills, I wanted to use this week's Report to talk about some of the legislation that will be debated and voted on over the next few weeks.

As is the case every year, the Senate has sent us several bills that mirror legislation already debated in the House. Senate Bill 245, for example, is that chamber's version of the telecommunications deregulation proposal that generated so much attention when it came before the House. I'm sure this measure will draw the same discussions as before: will it lower prices and give more choices to consumers, or will it cause your bills to go up and reduce services?

Like House Bill 1155, which passed earlier this session, SB 6 will require people convicted of child molestation to be placed on lifetime parole when they are released from prison. Both bills also will require some of these people to wear electronic tracking devices as a condition of their parole. SB 246 will prohibit some molesters from living within 1,000 feet of a school, park or youth center or within a mile of the homes of their victims. SB 6 was voted out of the Judiciary Committee earlier this week.

Representatives will get a chance to discuss the ongoing controversy that erupted last year when the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) shut down a series of license branches across Indiana. SB 92 would create a legislative committee to

review those closings, as well as any proposed shutdowns in the future, although the final decisions would be left with the BMV commissioner. Mt. Vernon is very familiar with the consternation accompanying an attempt to remove governmental services from a community.

SB 5 responds to a recent controversy that resulted when a hate group based in Kansas began protesting at military funerals in Indiana. The measure would prohibit protests within 500 feet of any funeral. As a side note, every time this issue is discussed, I take great pride in how Evansville and the surrounding community made a dignified and honorable stand against these purveyors of hate.

The House also will have the chance to renew debate on an issue that has cropped up several times in recent years. SB 88 would require all passengers in motor vehicles – including those in pickup trucks, recreational vehicles, tractors and in the back seats of automobiles – to wear safety belts.

SB 78 would give a property tax deduction to farmers who must spend money to securely store chemicals and pesticides so they will not be stolen by terrorists or people who want to use the materials to make illegal drugs like meth.

In an effort to reduce the use of tobacco by workers, SB 117 would enable an employer to provide financial incentives through health insurance benefits.

SB 340 would protect the pensions of state workers who lose their jobs because of privatization or if the facility where they work is shut down.

These are just a few of the bills we will be addressing in the coming weeks. Our third reading deadline is March 2, with conference committees to end by March 14. As always, if you would like to talk to me about any issue before the Indiana General Assembly, you can call me using the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet web site at www.IN.gov/H76 or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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